

News

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Natural Resources Conservation Service

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Texas Partnership to be featured in Historic White House Conference on Cooperative Conservation

Public and private sector participants will consider the advancement of President Bush's cooperative conservation vision

TEMPLE, TX - Aug. 17, 2005 - The U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS), along with other federal agencies, will participate in the White House Conference on Cooperative Conservation in St. Louis, MO., August 29-31, 2005. The conference will be a forum for the discussion of strategies being used to address conservation, natural resource, and environmental issues. The conference, subtitled "Strengthening Shared Governance and Citizen Stewardship," is being convened by the White House Council on Environmental Quality and will identify innovative and effective approaches to promoting cooperative conservation.

The conference will feature case studies highlighting some of the very best examples of cooperative conservation. The Central Texas Sustainability Partnership has been selected from conservation projects nationwide as one of the best illustrations of integrated public and private land stewardship.

The Partnership, based in central Texas counties and on Fort Hood, includes representatives from environmental agencies, universities, ranchers and others in the agriculture industry, as well as government agencies. The Partnership has demonstrated success in developing land management

practices on area ranches and on Fort Hood that have led to improved habitat and increased populations of two endangered songbird species, the black-capped vireo and golden-cheeked warbler. Additionally, through the treatment of re-growth of Ashe Juniper, water quality and quantity has increased in the treated areas.

“This private-public partnership serves as a successful model of how agencies, conservation organizations, and landowners can work together to develop land management practices that accomplish a variety of resource goals,” states NRCS State Conservationist Larry Butler.

NRCS has been providing conservation planning assistance for the project for many years and recently funded a grant for project research. USDA Farm Bill programs have been tailored to provide cost share and incentives to agriculture producers for the conservation practices that directly impact the success of the project.

“This project has been about finding solutions so we can improve bird habitat and increase water quality as part of our ranch management plan,” says Steve Manning, a fifth generation rancher near Gatesville, Texas, and one of the founding members of the Central Texas Sustainability Partnership. “The outcome has been successful because we were given the opportunity to find an effective management solution using input from all partners.”

“Fort Hood has the largest breeding populations of both bird species, but neither species can be recovered by our efforts alone,” states Rod Chisholm, Director of Public Works for the U.S. Army at Fort Hood. “Through close cooperation with our partners on the vast private lands in the state, we can achieve recovery of the species in a way that landowners support.”

Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns, Under Secretary Mark Rey, and Farm Service Agency, Forest Service, and Natural Resources Conservation Service senior officials are among the participants who will discuss strengthening shared governance and citizen stewardship.

Manning, Chisholm and select representatives from Environmental Defense and Texas Cooperative Extension will explain their Central Texas Sustainability Partnership case study in a 90-minute presentation on August 29 at the White House Conference.

The three-day conference launches a new conservation dialogue and philosophy for the 21st century that builds upon the legacy of a much similar convocation of leaders by President Theodore Roosevelt at the start of the last century. President Bush signed Executive Order #13352 on August 26, 2004, which directs the Departments of the Interior, Agriculture, Commerce, Defense and the Environmental Protection Agency to implement laws relating to the environment and natural resources in a manner that promotes cooperative conservation, with an emphasis on local inclusion.

The NRCS has been a conservation leader since it was founded in 1935, and serves as the nation's leading agency in conserving natural resources on private lands, while encouraging voluntary efforts to protect soil, water, and wildlife on private lands. NRCS draws on a tradition of principles in working with private landowners that is as relevant today as when the agency was created 70 years ago.

Media with valid press credentials are invited to register for the conference at <http://www.conservation.ceq.gov/media.html>. For more information on the conference agenda, access www.conservation.ceq.gov/

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